

16 December 1984

PROFESSOR LIVED DOUBLE LIFE, NEWSPAPER REPORTS
FULLERTON, CA

STAT

A physics professor who was killed in October, allegedly by a Vietnamese student, led a life of international intrigue, was being investigated by federal agencies and had received death threats, a newspaper reported Sunday.

Edward Lee Cooperman, 48, an outspoken opponent of the Vietnam war who visited Vietnam a dozen times starting in 1977, bought computer components and other high-technology equipment for Vietnam and funneled money to convicted atomic bomb spy Morton Sobell, The (Orange County) Register said.

U.S. policy bans shipping any commercial goods to Vietnam other than urgent humanitarian aid, said Steve Johnson, State Department Vietnam desk officer.

FBI spokesman Fred Regan in Los Angeles said his office was told not to discuss the case because it involves foreign counterintelligence.

The student accused of killing Cooperman, Minh Van Lam, 20, of Westminster, has pleaded innocent and is to go on trial next month. Lam claims he and Cooperman were toying with a gun in the professor's office at California State University, Fullerton, when the weapon went off.

Cooperman's notes reveal he had access to thousands of dollars through his Foundation for Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam, and he admitted buying high-technology equipment for Vietnam, the newspaper said.

"I went from Hanoi to Hong Kong to buy computer components-supplies" and returned, Cooperman wrote in a note found by police about his travels last May 27 through July 16. That trip also took him to Moscow and East Germany.

Relatives and friends contend he was killed either by U.S. agents or by right-wing Vietnamese extremists.

"I believe there is a lot more international intrigue involved than the story of a 20-year-old student who was just horsing around," said Cooperman's brother William.

But police believe they have a simple murder case.

"In relation to foreign intrigue, I can say that his death has caused information to come out that probably wouldn't have been known," police Capt. Don Bankhead said. "But we have nothing to indicate that his death was a plot or part of an international cause."

Lawrence Teeter, lawyer for Cooperman's wife Klaaske, said "Cooperman's activities were under intense scrutiny by agents of the Department of Commerce, the State Department, the CIA and FBI. In fact, agents from the CIA and FBI visited him at his office."

Thomas Eaton of the Commerce Department's Office of Export Enforcement in Burbank confirmed that his office was examining Cooperman's affairs.

"We opened a file on this case about four months before he died," Eaton said. "We got information from another federal agency (Customs) to the effect that he may be violating export regulations."

Continued

2

According to Cooperman's records, he collected hundreds of thousands of dollars in donations, including \$575,000 from the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization, for his Foundation for Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam, which he created in 1979.

But UNESCO officials contacted by The Register in Paris denied that he received funds and said he was only a technical adviser for Vietnam programs.

"The Foundation for Scientific Cooperation with Vietnam had nothing to do with UNESCO," said C.S. Hakansson, UNESCO science program specialist. "We did not give him funds."

Cooperman's projects included using solar technology to dry rice, windmills for power and a study of the effects of the defoliant Agent Orange.

Roger Dittman, a Cal State professor and friend of Cooperman, said Cooperman checked each shipment with the Commerce and State departments.

"He told me he was getting reasonable interpretations (of law) and sometimes even sympathetic interpretations from the Commerce Department," Dittman said.

State and Commerce officials denied they allowed Cooperman to ship prohibited items.

Cooperman also gave \$15,000 to Morton Sobell, 66, who was convicted in 1951 of conspiracy to commit espionage with Julius and Ethel Rosenberg, who were executed for their roles in giving the Soviet Union atomic bomb secrets.

Sobell, sentenced to 30 years but paroled in 1969, said from New York that he used the money for soil tests and to develop hearing aids for Vietnam. He said he was aware of the material Cooperman was sending to Vietnam.

"So were people in the government," Sobell said. "I was amazed that the State Department and Commerce Department were allowing him to operate that easily. ... Those were not the only agencies aware of what was being sent. The FBI and CIA were also aware. I'm sure of that."

Alan May, Lam's attorney, claimed in court papers filed Friday in Santa Ana that the governments of Vietnam and the United States pressured Cooperman to commit suicide.

"The Vietnamese government became skeptical of him because he had not delivered all he should and had seriously dipped into the funds for himself and his friends rather than use them for Hanoi's benefit," May wrote.